

PS 635
29 R 667

His Charity Patient

An Original Play in One Act

BY

REED ROBINSON

San Diego, California

(All Rights Reserved)

JUL 27 1914

© Cl. D 37824

no 1

PS635
Z9 R667

Published by
KEELER & GILLRUP
331 F Street,
SAN DIEGO, CAL.

First Edition Fifty Copies.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Dr. Robert Lockhard—A young physician.

Helen—His wife.

Mrs. Milstead—A widowed mother.

SCENE—Waiting room of Dr. Lockhard's residence office. Time, 3 A. M.

U. E. C.—Double door with portieres; drop light overhead; opening onto interior residence hall.

R. U. E.—Door opening onto outer hall.

Open Stage—Table desk, scattered with books, magazines, medical papers; desk telephone; chair beside table to right, facing front. Behind table, mantle, with clock.

Prompt Stage—Plain table with drop light.

P. R. C.—Medicine wall—cabinet.

Curtain discovers semi-dark stage, drop lights on over portieres and treating table. Curtain followed by clock striking three. On third stroke enter Helen U. E. C. dressed in charming negligee, hair slightly tousled. Stands momentarily in front of curtains with two hands drawing them together behind her. Raises arms, uplifted sleeves falling back from elbow, disclosing contour of arms; yawns sleepily and bends hands to head in business of fixing back hair. Switches light to full stage; glances at clock.

HELEN (yawning; then long sigh)—Three o'clock and Bob still out at that horrid old banquet. Oh, well, he's worked hard building up his practice for five years without a real vacation, poor lad. Practically his only fun has been the annual dinner with his college classmates, which he's taking in tonight. (Crosses L. L. to telephone table; stands idly leafing magazines as she speaks, half facing front.) Funny thing, Bob is not a drinking man. But once a year, at this dinner, he gets completely, gloriously and deliberately "soused," as he calls it. (Brief pause.) You know (abruptly said and turning impulsively toward audience as though taking them into her confidence), I think lots of men drink, not because they like it, but because they think it is up to them to do it. Man is prone to do what is expected of him. A certain amount of drinking seems to be one of the things expected of a man. So (with a careless shrug) he drinks to show he can do it and carry his liquor like a gentleman. Trouble with most men seems to be that a certain amount of drinking has no limit. Another queer thing about a man, I have noticed, is that he is usually awfully glad the morning after that he missed the night before. Things seem different in the cold, gray dawn. And— (phone rings; turns to take it up) Now I wonder who that can be at this time of night? Hello? Dr. Lockhard's house. No, the doctor is not here. Mrs. Lockhard speaking. Oh, yes, Mrs. Milstead. How is the baby? (Listens) Pneumonia is an awful thing. (Listens) Convulsions! Heavens, that is dreadful! I expect the doctor any minute. You had better come over right away. Get somebody to stay with the baby. Mrs. Sweeney, your neighbor? All right, then, you'll come over right away? Good-bye.

(Hangs up receiver, places phone on table; seats herself. As she starts talking clasps hands on table in front of her.)

HELEN—Now there's an instance of the doctor's kindness. He has been treating that baby for weeks for nothing. The mother is a widow and a scrubwoman, and the poor little child is a sickly thing. A scrubwoman hardly earns enough to keep body and soul together and her baby alive. She cannot afford doctor's bills, and it usually depends on the doctor's kindness whether the babies live or die. Thank God, Bob's heart's right. (Glances at clock.) The old dear, he ought to be here now.

(Thus of closing door heard off stage. Helen rises quickly.)

HELEN—There! He's coming!

(Bob heard off stage singing typical college song in manner to indicate he has been drinking. Enters R. U. E. Silk hat on back of head, hair tousled, cravat slightly awry, walking stick carelessly thrust under left arm. Right glove in hand, tugging at left glove. Stands just inside door, weaving slightly back and forth.)

BOB—Hello, lovebird? I'm back again. Your laddie is some soused. Made three trips up front steps gettin' this package inside. Some drunk, some package, and, believe me, some dinner. (Sighs gruntingly.) By jove, I'm glad to get home. Any calls? But ne' mind. Thank God, nob'dy 'spects me to be doctor 'til t'm'rah.

HELEN—Well, Buddie, you talk as though you had a good time.

(Bob places hat and gloves on chair, throwing coat over another, trying to stand stick against wall. Stick falls down and he swears mutteringly at it as he turns to answer.)

BOB (expansively)—Goo' time! (Nods head) Y'r perfectly good an' right, m'dear. (Advancing toward center stage as he talks. Helen moves to meet him.)

BOB—Shay, Helen, I mus' tell you goo' one on ole Beany Sewell. We came home same taxicab. When we got to his house I helped him up steps. (Laughs.) I'm pretty full, but Beany was loaded. He goes up to his front door and tries t' unlatch it. Couldn' do it. (Laughs.) I looked t' see wha' was s'matter, an' th' darn ole fool was tryin' t' unlatch his front door with a cigar! (Laughs.) I says to him, "Don't you know, Beany, ole man, you can't unlatch y'r door with a cigar? He held up the cigar (laughs), looked at it an' looked at me, an' wha' d'you think he said. (Chuckles to himself.) He said, "My God, Bob, I've smoked my latchkey!" It's firs' time he's been as drunk as that since—

(Helen comes close to Bob and takes lapels of dress coat in either hand, looking up into his face. Business by Helen of struggling between desire to laugh and be serious as she recalls Mrs. Milstead's call.)

HELEN—That's awfully funny, Bob, and just like Beany. You had a call just a moment ago.

(Bob starts quickly and then crosses, right, to medicine cabinet.)

BOB—Call, huh? Well, I need a drink. Who was it?

(Opens cabinet, takes out bottle and glass. Pours drink while Helen is talking.)

HELEN—Yes, that Mrs. Milstead 'phoned. Said the baby's cold is worse and she thought it had pneumonia. Said it had convulsions and she wanted to see you very much. She told me she was coming right over.

(Bob faces front, holding filled glass in one hand, bottle in other, waving them while talking, looks dejectedly at audience with disgusted expression.)

BOB—Now, wha' d' you know about that? All year, I work like a dog; on the job every minute, an' th' one time in the year when I take a night off—blooie! blooie! I get a midnight call to disturb peace of min'. And, worse of all, from a charity patient. Damn!!

HELEN—But, dear, Mrs. Milstead said the baby was frightfully ill and that she was coming right over. She'll be here any moment.

(Thud of closing door heard off stage.)

HELEN—That must be she now. Yes, here she is.

(Enter Mrs. Milstead R. U. E., dressed in faded black skirt, old shoes, shawl over head, patched kitchen apron. Advances hurriedly toward doctor, outstretched hands.)

MRS. MILSTEAD—Oh, doctor, doctor, the baby's took a bad turn for the worse. Its got convulsions something awful. I think it's pneumonia. You told me if I needed it to come to you for medicine. Won't you give me some medicine, quick?

(At the word "medicine" Lockhard straightens, throws back shoulders and seems to don, as though it were a garment, the professional manner of a physician. Turns toward Mrs. M. and says, gravely:)

BOB—Did you give the baby anything to eat tonight except what I told you it might have?

MRS. M.—Why, doctor, all I gave it was a little piece of tender cabbage. I didn't think that would hurt it. And the poor dear was crying so hard.

(Bob facing front, throws out hands in gesture of despair.)

BOB—Sick baby! She feeds it cabbage! Can you beat that?

(Turning to woman and speaking severely, in a very professional manner.)

BOB—Very well, my good woman, I will prepare some medicine for the baby at once which will be just the thing for it. Don't worry. The child has a bad attack of colic.

(Turns to medicine cabinet, takes graduated glass and small prescription in left hand, large medicine bottle in right. Places prescription bottle on table. Then holds graduated glass to light and carefully pours dose. This done, he places large medicine bottle on table under drop light, with poison label conspicuously displayed to audience. Then he turns dose from graduated glass into small prescription bottle, writes label and pastes on bottle, which he hands to woman.)

BOB—There, that will fix the baby tonight. Give it a spoonful as soon as you get home, another in half an hour, another in an hour as per directions. If the baby sleeps, let it go. Give it no more medicine until it awakes. Now, hurry along and look after the kiddie.

MRS. M.—Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you, doctor. I'll be going now. (Turns and starts toward door. Stops at door and half turns.) Oh, than you, doctor; how can I ever repay you?

BOB—By not trying to. Hurry along now.

(Exit widow, R. U. E.)

(Bob turns to wife. Places his hands on her shoulders, looking down into her eyes.)

BOB—There, dear, is a typical city tenement baby case. That kid is awfully sick. It will probably live through this illness, but chances are the mother will never raise it. By jove, little woman, when one stops to think of the surroundings in which some babies are born and through which they must live as children, it seems wonderful so many survive. Take this poor little kiddie. Father dead, mother poor, has to work for a living. Goes out during the day and scrubs and scrubs, and gives up her precious bodily strength to make a day's wage to live on, leaving that poor child alone most of the time. That strength the mother uses up in working she should be husbanding at home to give to her baby. It does seem as though there is something wrong with the times when we find so many, many cases of mothers being forced to do that same thing. Society pays the price by turning out a lot of weakling children who grow into weakling men and women. Oh, well (removes hands from wife's shoulders, gives wide sweep upward with outspread arms and then drops hands quickly to sides, slapping thighs. Turn, facing front), maybe it can't be helped. Waht is, is, and what must be, must be.

(Remains for brief instant as in brown study. Starts suddenly. Speaks abruptly and informatively to audience as though seized with a brilliant idea.)

BOB—I need another drink.

(Helen crosses L. L. C. to point back of table, open stage. Bob crosses right to cabinet, takes glass and bottle therefrom. Carefully pours himself a drink, replacing bottle in cabinet. Regards glass of liquor appreciatively, holding it up between him and audience, then tosses it off. Turns toward table, smacking lips, lowering glass and followin it with his eyes.)

BOB—Ah, pretty ood stuff, that.

(Starts carefully to place glass on table in line with medicine bottle. His eyes following the glass come in contact with the bottle of poison on the table. At this point he discovers medicine bottle contains poison. Drops glass on floor and starts forward, clutching table on either edge. Stares at audience horror-struck. Passes hand across eyes in bewildered manner, as though brushing away impediment to his sight. Looks again at bottle.)

BOB (ejaculating in piercing whisper)—Poison! Heaven help me!

(Clutchin at heart with right hand, leaning heavily on table with left, looking at audience with stricken face.)

(Helen, realizing something is wrong, leans toward Bob with yearning gesture.)

HELEN (in deeply concerned tone)—Bob, what's the matter?

(Bob silently points to bottle. Helen steps forward, looks at it and gasps, as she realizes significance of the label, and thinks of the baby. Tableau. Helen, hands at breast, looks at Bob with her soul in her eyes. Bob faces audience with stricken look. Both drive home with business the horror of discovery Bob has given the widow wrong medicine for her child, which, instead of curing, will kill it. Bob turns to wife finally, speaking in sepulchral tone.)

BOB—My God, Helen, I'm a murderer! I gave that woman poison for her baby's medicine! I have killed that child! That means I'm a murderer!

(Helen shrinks as though struck in face.)

HELEN—Oh, Bob! (Brief pause for picture. Helen backed against right side of table, resting against it as though for support, both hands grasping edge behind her. Telephone rings. Both start as though suddenly frightened. Bob turns, raises clenched right hand in front of him.)

BOB (in startled, piercing whisper)—My God, who's that?

(Helen turns to 'phone; picks it up and answers it.)

HELEN—Yes, this is Dr. Lockhard's house. The police station! Hold the wire. I'll see.

(Helen turns toward Bob, placing left hand over mouthpiece, holding 'phone from her in left.)

HELEN—Bob, it's the police station! They want to know if you are here. What shall I tell them?

BOB—The police! Asking for Dr. Lockhard, and me a murderer!
(Throws left hand outward toward Helen; places clenched right at forehead.)

BOB—Let me think. (Picture.)
(Thud of outer door heard off stage.)

BOB (starting)—Who's that?
(Enter Mrs. Milstead R. U. E. Shawl half off shoulders, hair streaming. Runs toward doctor with hands clasped to breast.)

MRS. MILSTEAD—Doctor, doctor, what shall I do? I dropped the bottle of medicine you gave me for the baby, and it broke.
(Tableau.)

BOB (relaxing)—Thank God! (Heaves large sigh. Draws himself erect, turns to wife in lordly manner.)

BOB—Tell the police station Dr. Lockhard is here and asks what they want.

HELEN (at 'phone)—Dr. Lockhard wants to know what you want. (Listens. Turns to Bob.) There's been a railroad wreck and you're wanted.

BOB (assuming very professional air, to Helen)—Tell them I'm coming at once. (Importantly.) Get my medicine bag!!
(Starts toward coat and hat.)

C U R T A I N

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 017 400 159 5